



Coordinating Council for Children in Crisis, Inc.

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CCCC has been working with survivors of domestic violence since 1986 and has worked with immigrant women facing domestic violence for 11 years. Since that date we have seen an increase in the number of undocumented women being involved with our services. We also run the first support group in the city of New Haven exclusively for undocumented women, which attempts, to link their experiences of immigration with the situation of domestic violence. It is very important to understand that the impact of domestic violence in cases involving immigrant undocumented women is much more severe than the common effects of DV, given the lack of supportive networks that these women usually face. Overall, the circumstances and obstacles they have to face in order to overcome the abuse are much complex.

From our work with these women we can testify that there are several issues affecting their decision of seeking police help. Among those are:

- The present political and social environment that accuses them for being here illegally and that denies not only their economic and social contribution to this country but also the human rights they are entitled to.
- The present environment against undocumented Latinos and Latinas have contributed to making them feel fearful of any kind of authority but mainly police and legal systems. The women we work with have told us about their fear of being deported if the police find they are undocumented. They also fear that their partners could be deported if they have them arrested for the abuse. To be clear, all these women want their partners stop the violence; however, they know that if

their partners are arrested, they face the possibility of being deported and then they, the women, will not have the means to provide and take care for their families or at least they will see their options very limited. In many cases, the men are the ones who pay for the more substantial resources, such as rent, utilities and food. Women know that their financial situation will worsen while their partners are in prison or deported. I would like to highlight here that these women do not qualify for the limited assistance the State offers to victims of domestic violence.

- Moreover, these women also fear they could have their children removed when DCF learns there is DV in their homes. They want to get help and they are, in our experience, one of the most assiduous clients, however the threat of their children's removal for something they cannot control, such as their partners' violence, becomes a great obstacle.
- These fears are also linked to a lack of knowledge of how the system works in this country and the lack of knowledge about their own rights, which may relate to a cultural belief that endorses violence against women as the norm. In many cases, one of my functions is to explain to women that they have the right to call the police no matter if her husband is the one paying the rent. I educate women that they can call the authorities for help regardless of legal status since the police are not supposed to ask for it. Likewise, when there is a protective order in place, several of these women do not understand what is being done to them, especially if the protective order is given in English. Another of my functions has also become advocating for these women with DCF since the majority of the workers are not prepared to work with the specific circumstances of these women and families.
- One more obstacle for these women is the language barrier. These women not only have to confront the intimidation that usually comes with DV and therefore, the fear and mistrust in people, but they also have to communicate in a language in which they are not proficient. Many times, they cannot explain to a police officer what is happening to them and the ways they are being abused. In some cases women have been mistreated by police officers due to the language barrier

and for being “immigrants”. This does not help to create a view of the police as support and helper.

I would like to end this statement by stressing two points. First, there is a need for having professionals including police officers, victim advocates, social workers and DCF workers who can speak foreign languages and are specifically trained in multicultural competence. Second, any initiative addressing immigrants’ concerns should have the participation of the immigrant community or at least community agencies that have a close relationship with them. We need to understand very clearly, the circumstance around domestic violence for these women and we need to have their input on the issues they need help with.